

Fast response limited damage to Bank St. property

FROM C1

thick black smoke billowing from the 120-year-old building. A construction crew was working on the fourth floor at the time. City records show permits were in place for the work.

The building, the former Jason's Furniture that most recently housed an indoor flea market, was vacant at the time of the fire and in transition. The new development under construction is to be known as Riverbank, advertised as 16 luxury one- and two-bedroom apartments with harbor views, high ceilings, large windows, hardwood floors, granite counter tops and room for a restaurant or retail space at street level.

The plans for the rehabilitation project include a new roof and new windows throughout the building. Work crews were expected to be back on site Thursday to assess damage and mitigate some of the water damage.

High Tide Capital credited the fire department, fire marshal's office and building department for quick action and Mayor Michael Passero for timely correspondences about

New London Fire Chief Tom Curcio credited the staffing level, quick response and knowledge of both the firefighters and emergency dispatchers as the reasons the fire was contained mostly to the area where it started.

the unfolding situation.

"As a building owner in town, it's reassuring to have resources available when disasters like this happen," High Tide said.

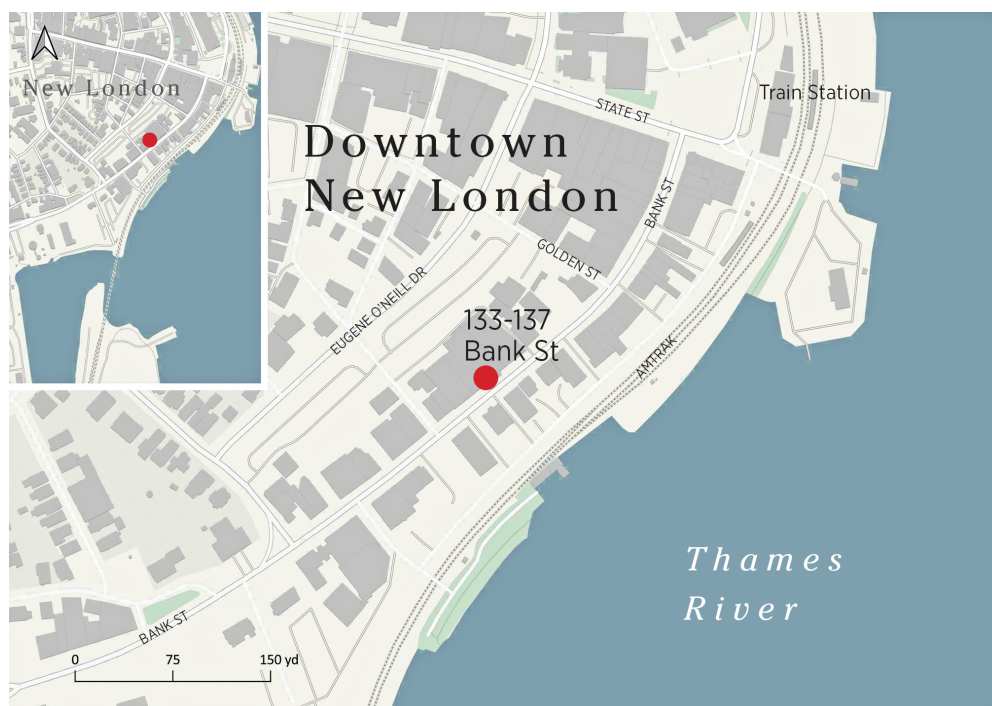
Before the fire, the building's owners estimated it would take about nine months to complete the project, even as work continues on a sister project at the Manwaring Building at 223-229 State St. The timeline has not yet changed.

New London Fire Marshal Vernon Skau said the cause of the fire remains under investigation. He said there was ongoing work in the building at the time of the fire and propane heaters on the fourth floor. There was also temporary electrical lines in the building to allow for use of equipment and lights.

New London Fire Chief Tom Curcio credited the staffing level, quick response and knowledge of both the firefighters and emergency dispatchers as the reasons the fire was contained mostly to the area where it started. The department has 16 firefighters on call at any given time and ability to call on mutual aid for occasions such as Wednesday's fire, when more ladder trucks were brought in to not only fight the fire but protect surrounding buildings.

The building where the fire occurred is adjacent to both Right Path Organic Cafe and apartments at 147 Bank St. on one side and a stalled rehab project at 123 Bank St., the site of the former New London Antiques Center, on the other.

"Although it was vacant, we



SCOTT RITTER/THE DAY | SOURCES: CARTODB; OPENSTREETMAP

The owners of the Bank Street building damaged by a fire on Wednesday say plans for a historic renovation have become more complicated but remain on track. High Tide Capital said damage to the building at 133-137 Bank St. was minimal, and credited New London Fire Department and city officials for a quick response.

didn't want it to spread next door," Curcio said. "It was a great save."

Curcio said the last major fire in downtown that he recalls was at 130 State St.,

the Bacon Building, in 2013.

While the damage caused by a fire that began on the fourth floor was severe, firefighters had stopped the blaze from spreading to adjacent build-

ings. That fire displaced 20 residents and two businesses, including Monica's State Street Diner and Zambala Grocery.

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Stonington schools now need a superintendent and HS principal

FROM C1

and middle school math teacher as well as a science, technology, engineering and math coordinator and the assistant principal at the high school. In 2014, he was selected as the high school's new principal, replacing Stephen Murphy, who retired after 19 years.

The Board of Education, which has begun the process of hiring a new superintendent to replace Van Riley, who is retiring, also now will begin looking for Friese's replacement.

At Thursday night's school board meeting, Riley presented a timeline for hiring a new principal. This month he will meet with staff, parents and

students to discuss the selection criteria and process. The vacancy then will be posted on Jan. 31, with an application deadline of Feb. 11.

Applications then will be screened and references checked, with the first round of interviews done by a committee on Feb. 22 and 23. The finalists will be interviewed Feb 28 and March 1, with the announcement of the new principal by March 4. Riley will select the new principal and the board will approve the hiring at its March 10 meeting, with the new principal being welcomed that night.

The new principal is expected to begin work July 1.

Riley told the school board

Thursday night the district always begins such searches early in the year in order to attract the best candidates.

Because the plan is to hire both the new principal and superintendent about the same time in March, several board members said Riley's successor should have a role in helping him choose the new principal. Riley said he would be willing to consult with the new superintendent but opposed having his replacement choose the new principal because that person would not have been involved in the search process.

The final decision, however, will be Riley's because he does not retire until July 1.

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Driver says he doesn't remember driving on Route 49 before crash

FROM C1

en to Rhode Island Hospital in Providence. The affidavit didn't specify the nature of his injuries.

The affidavit said police interviewed Pont on April 16. Pont said he didn't remember driving on Route 49 leading up to the accident and said he didn't have anything to drink before leaving his house. The affidavit said Pont departed the southbound lane "for an unknown reason."

State police referred further

questions from The Day to the New London Judicial District State's Attorney's Office, which didn't respond to a message Thursday.

According to police logs from The Westerly Sun, Pont was charged Dec. 5, 2021, in Hopkinton, R.I. with "driving under the influence with an unknown blood alcohol content and refusal to submit to a chemical test, second offense within five years."

Ryan Poland's obituary said he left behind three children,

both parents and two siblings. The obituary described him as a songwriter and musician who had a deep love of fishing and a passion for cooking, music and gardening. He was a master carpenter.

East Bay Newspapers reported that there's now a bench dedicated to Poland overlooking Brickyard Pond in Barrington, a spot where Poland often walked as a young boy and where he loved to fish.

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AG looks at high rates nursing home staffing agencies charge

By SUSAN HAIGH
Associated Press

Connecticut nursing home operators say a staffing crisis is being exacerbated by competition for workers with mostly out-of-state nurse staffing agencies they've been forced to hire to fill their depleted ranks.

This week, the chairman of the state's nursing home association said one staffing company, also called staffing pools, charged \$84 an hour for a nurse's aide while another posted their pay rates in hopes they could "steal" employees with promises of more money.

"The reason that it's so bad is that we need the pools. So they are then allowed to charge whatever they want," said Larry Santilli, the association's chairman and the president and CEO of Athena Health Care Systems. "So this is a war."

He was speaking during a meeting of the state's Nursing Home Financial Advisory Committee on Wednesday.

Connecticut Attorney General William Tong said attorneys in the antitrust section of his office have met with nurs-

ing home industry officials about what he called "serious concerns" raised by the Connecticut Association of Health Care Facilities/Connecticut Center for Assisted Living and Leading Age Connecticut about the staffing agencies.

The two organizations sent a letter to Tong in November asking him to review what they called "anti-competitive and ongoing price-gouging practices."

"The concerns raised in this letter regarding hiring practices are troubling, and we are aware that other state attorneys general are hearing similar reports," Tong said in statement, adding that his office is reviewing the claims along with other state agencies.

The two Connecticut associations' national parent organizations recently sent similar letters to the chairperson of the Federal Trade Commission requesting an investigation into examples around the country of homes, desperate for staff, having to pay "exorbitant" prices for outside staffing agencies that are financially unsustainable for the homes

that rely heavily on taxpayer funds.

Some state nursing home associations, including in Connecticut, are seeking state legislative fixes to prevent the agencies from charging double to quadruple what the homes are paying their staffs, said Mark Parkinson, president and CEO of the American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living.

Santilli said he recently met with Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont and other state officials to discuss the need for caps on how much outside agencies can charge.

"If we don't do something about this, it's impossible for us to get the staff back from the pools," he said.

Santilli said the staffing situation has also made it difficult for many nursing homes to accept patients being discharged from hospitals — some of which are experiencing their own staffing challenges — and help free up beds during the omicron surge.

Associated Press Writer Pat Eaton-Robb contributed to this report.

Ex-homeless shelter head agrees to pay \$6M settlement in Massachusetts

Boston (AP) — The former head of a publicly funded nonprofit that runs homeless shelters in Massachusetts has agreed to pay \$6 million to settle allegations that he funneled state money to himself by renting properties he owned to the shelter at inflated rates, the state attorney general's office announced Thursday.

The consent judgment, entered in Suffolk Superior Court on Wednesday, resolves a lawsuit filed in September against Manuel

Duran, the former executive director and CEO of Casa Nueva Vida, which has multiple family shelters in Boston and Lawrence.

Duran signed leases on the organization's behalf for investment properties he owned, charged substantially above fair rental value, and directed the organization to use funding it received from the state to pay for improvements, the attorney general's office said.

He then falsely certified

compliance with state regulations designed to detect such dealings, the office said. The organization was at the time more than 90% state funded, authorities said.

Duran redirected more than \$2 million in state funds to himself through his actions, but because this case was brought under the state's False Claims Act, which allows for up to triple damages, Duran will pay the state \$6 million, the attorney general's office said.

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